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Alleged co-conspirator outlines Tanaka's role

The former undersheriff is accused of obstructing an investigation of corruption

By Sarah Favot
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Jurors in the criminal corruption trial of former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka heard for the first time Tuesday from one of Tanaka's alleged co-conspirators about specific actions taken to hide an

inmate from the FBI. Tanaka, the elected mayor of Gardena, is accused of obstructing a federal investigation into brutality and corruption by deputies in Los Angeles County jails in 2011. He's charged with obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice, and has pleaded not guilty.

Former Deputy Mickey Manzo testified for nearly three hours Tuesday for the prosecution. Manzo, who now works for Home Depot, indicated he was among those tasked with ensuring that FBI agents did not have access to their informant, inmate Anthony Brown, after it was dis-

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Former Los Angeles County Undersheriff Paul Tanaka and his wife, Valerie, leave US District Court in Los Angeles on Tuesday. Tanaka is on trial for criminal corruption.

HANS GUTKNECHT
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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covered that Brown had a cellphone that was smuggled into jail by a deputy who accepted a bribe from an undercover FBI agent.

Manzo testified that Tanaka was "visibly upset" when he was told that the cellphone was used to call the civil rights division of FBI headquarters.

Manzo said former Sheriff Lee Baca was "confused" and wanted to know what was going on. Baca ordered that Brown, who was slated to go to state prison to serve his 400-plus year prison sentence, remain in the custody of the Sheriff's Department, be interviewed by deputies, and that everything be taken off of the phone, Manzo said.

Once Tanaka heard recordings of phone calls made from the inmate to an FBI agent, Manzo said Tanaka was "irate." Manzo added that Tanaka stood up and slammed his hands down on a table.

"He said, 'Those motherf---. Who do they think they are?'" Manzo testified, saying that Tanaka was referring to the FBI.

Manzo said at that point, Baca tasked a captain with heading the investigation into the cellphone and that, "Everything that came out of the investigation would be run through Mr. Tanaka."

Manzo testified that he wrote a policy, under the direction of his boss, that said the FBI could not interview any inmate without Tanaka's approval. The policy was later amended to remove any reference to Tanaka.

Manzo was convicted in 2014 along with five other former Sheriff's Department officials. He was sentenced to two years in federal prison but is out on bail while his appeal is pending. He was granted immunity to testify at Tanaka's trial.

Manzo said he, along with his partner Deputy Gerard Smith, who was also convicted in the obstruction of justice case, coordinated a schedule for deputies to stand guard outside Brown's cell.

Manzo also testified that Brown was moved from the Men's Central Jail to a station jail in San Dimas and was re-booked into the system under various aliases.

While Manzo said Tanaka did not give him direct orders, he said his former boss Lt. Greg Thompson, who was also convicted, gave him the orders from Tanaka.

During cross-examination, Tanaka's attorney H. Dean Steward emphasized, and Manzo agreed, that Sheriff's Department officials had mentioned concern about Brown's safety from deputies and other inmates during a discussion about guarding his cell since the inmate had been exposed as a federal informant regarding abuse and corruption by deputies.

Jurors also heard recordings of interviews with Brown after Sheriff's Department officials discovered the cellphone that he was using to speak to the FBI. During the interviews, deputies, sergeants, a lieutenant and a captain tried to glean from Brown what information he gave the FBI about deputy abuse.

COURTS

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Witnesses: Tanaka dismissed jail abuses

Supervisors told to let deputies 'do what they have to do' to inmates

By Sarah Favot

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The first witnesses to testify in Paul Tanaka's corruption trial said Friday the former Los Angeles County undersheriff ignored warnings that deputies were acting like gang members.

Testifying for the prosecution, retired Sheriff's Department officials said they were transferred out of their jobs after raising concerns about deputies' behavior.

Tanaka, who served as then-Sheriff Lee Baca's top aide, is accused of thwarting a federal investigation into inmate abuse by deputies and corruption and civil rights violations in the county's downtown jails. He has pleaded not guilty to charges of obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice. His trial began Wednesday in a downtown Los Angeles federal courtroom.

Al Gonzales, a retired lieutenant who worked at Men's Central Jail in 2003 and 2004, testified that he told a deputy that the way he was acting reminded him of a gang member. As an example, Gonzales said, deputies who worked on the jail's most dangerous floors associated only



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with each other. He said although deputies finished their shifts in a staggered fashion, they would wait for the entire floor's deputies to be dismissed and they would "march down the escalator" in unison.

During a 2006 meeting Tanaka held at Men's Central Jail, Gonzales testified, the then-undersheriff told supervisors that they should let deputies "do what they have to do" in dealing with inmates.

John Clark, a captain

at Men's Central Jail from 2004 to 2006, testified that he decided the incidence of use of force against inmates could be reduced if deputies were rotated among jail floors every two months. Clark said he received approval for the plan from his boss and sent a memo about it to deputies. But Tanaka quashed the plan.

Clark, who is retired, testified that soon after that, he was transferred out of his post at the jail.

Steve Roller, a former captain of the Century Station, testified that he also was transferred out of his job after he reported concerns about a 2007 meeting be-

"I was in shock because it had contradicted everything I was trying to do at Century"

— Steve Roller, a former captain of the Century Station

tween Tanaka and his staff at the station in Lynwood.

Roller said Tanaka told deputies that in dealing with gang members, sometimes they have to "cross the line." Roller, who is now retired, said he took that to mean that they should break department policy or the law.

"I was in shock because

it had contradicted everything I was trying to do at Century," Roller said.

The trial will continue Tuesday.

Federal prosecutors allege Tanaka, the longtime mayor of the city of Gardena, and others in the Sheriff's Department obstructed justice when they hid an inmate from the FBI in 2011 after they learned the inmate was a federal informant. Prosecutors also allege that members of the department tampered with potential witnesses by telling them not to cooperate with federal investigators and threatened to arrest an FBI agent at her home.

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COUNTY JAILS CASE

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Tanaka corruption trial begins

Opening statements give differing profiles of former undersheriff

By Sarah Favot

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It was a tale of two Paul Tanakas. Prosecutors on Thursday painted the former Los Angeles County undersheriff as a criminal in the opening arguments of his corruption trial, while the defense said Tanaka was simply following orders.

A jury of seven women and five men was seated in a downtown

L.A. federal courtroom after a day and a half of jury selection.

During his opening statements, Assistant U.S. Attorney Brandon Fox said when Tanaka found out that the FBI was investigating deputy abuse and corruption in the county jails, he made a decision to conceal his deputies' crimes but, in doing so, he committed crimes himself.

"Instead of squashing the scandal, Mr. Tanaka created a greater one than he ever imagined," Fox said.

Tanaka, the former second-in-command of the Sheriff's Department, is charged with obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice. He has pleaded not

guilty.

Prosecutors allege Tanaka and others within the Sheriff's Department during the summer of 2011 obstructed justice when they hid an inmate from the inmate after they learned the inmate was a federal informant. They also allege that members of the Sheriff's Department tampered with potential witnesses by telling them not to cooperate with federal investigators and threatening to arrest an FBI agent at her home.

The courtroom was filled with

spectators, reporters, Tanaka's family and friends and others, including U.S. Attorney Eileen Decker. Tanaka is the longtime mayor of the city of Gardena.

Fox told the jury that when commanders and captains within the jail system brought concerns about excessive use of force by deputies against inmates to Tanaka's attention, he ignored the problems.

Fox said Tanaka and others were worried about the federal investigation because they knew that problems of abuse and corruption were going on in the jails and if the FBI investigation was successful, then those problems

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"Instead of squashing the scandal, Mr. Tanaka created a greater one than he ever imagined."

—Assistant U.S. Attorney Brandon Fox, in his opening statement in the trial of former Los Angeles County Undersheriff Paul Tanaka.



Online: Read previous coverage of the Paul Tanaka corruption case at DAILYBREEZE.COM

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would be revealed.

Fox said that during a special meeting held on a Saturday after Sheriff's Department officials learned about the FBI investigation, Tanaka repeatedly said "F--- the FBI" and explained that this was "one of the most important investigations in the Sheriff's Department in its 160-year history."

Tanaka's attorney, Jerome Haig, painted a different picture. He told the jurors that Tanaka lived by the creed of the Sheriff's Department and its core values.

Haig told the jury that former Sheriff Lee Baca was the one who was angry about the FBI's investigation. Baca was "going crazy," Haig said.

Haig claimed Baca gave Tanaka two broad instructions: protect the federal informant and investigate how the cellphone got into the jail.

"(Tanaka) showed up every day doing exactly what the sheriff asked him to do," Haig said.

The trial, which continues today, is expected to last about three weeks.

TANAKA TRIAL

Prospective jurors are asked about police bias

Former undersheriff is accused of obstructing a federal investigation

Thur 3-24-16

By Sarah Favot

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The men and women who could decide the fate of former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka were asked Wednesday about police bias during jury selection.

Tanaka, the former second-in-command of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, is accused of obstructing a federal probe into brutality and corruption inside the county's downtown jails.

He is charged with obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice. He has pleaded not guilty.



Tanaka

Prosecutors allege Tanaka and others within the Sheriff's Department obstructed justice when they hid an inmate from the FBI, after they learned the inmate was a federal informant, tampered with potential witnesses by telling them not to cooperate with federal investigators and threatened to arrest an FBI agent at her home.

Jury selection began Wednesday morning in Tanaka's criminal trial as more than 110 potential jurors gathered in two federal courtrooms in downtown Los Angeles.

Tanaka, who is out on bond, was dressed in a black suit. About six of his friends and family members, including his wife, were in the courtroom during the day-long proceedings.

U.S. District Court Judge Percy Anderson said he expects the trial to last about three weeks, plus more time for the jury to deliberate.

During the questioning of pro-

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spective jurors, a process known as voir dire, jurors were asked about their previous interactions with law enforcement, whether they had read or heard about the case and allegations of civil rights violations in the county jails. They were also asked if any of their family members were law enforcement officers and if any of these experiences would prevent them from being fair and impartial.

Some jurors were excused because they explained hardships that would be caused if they served on the jury. A handful of others were excused after questioning.

Prosecutors said Tanaka, as undersheriff, ignored warnings by command staff within the jails and

by outside agencies, including the American Civil Liberties Union, that deputies were acting like gang members and beating inmates.

Tanaka was indicted in May along with a Sheriff's Department captain, William "Tom" Carey, who pleaded guilty in August to lying on the stand during the trial of another deputy. Carey is expected to testify.

According to the indictment, in August 2011, Sheriff's Department officials learned that a cellphone had been smuggled into the Men's Central Jail and into the hands of an inmate, Anthony Brown, who was working with FBI investigators. A deputy accepted a bribe from an undercover FBI agent in exchange for smuggling the phone to Brown.

Sheriff's Department officials immediately began investigating how the cellphone got into the jail.

Once they discovered the phone came from the FBI, they made several attempts to block the FBI from accessing Brown, including rebooking him into the system under aliases, moving him to a medical ward and the San Dimas station jail, and standing guard outside his cell.

Seven former Sheriff's Department officials have been convicted in this case.

Retired Sheriff Lee Baca pleaded guilty last month to lying to federal investigators during an April 2011 interview about his involvement. Baca had long said he knew little about the actions his officers took.

Baca, who is not expected to testify, is scheduled to be sentenced in the spring.

Jury selection is expected to continue this morning and testimony could begin later in the day.